



State of California

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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**Prison reception centers still failed to isolate potentially
violent inmates after officer's stabbing death**

The Office of the Inspector General today reported the results of a surprise review that found that five of the state's prison reception centers were still inadvertently placing potentially dangerous inmates in general population living units instead of administrative segregation, despite attempts to correct the problem after the fatal stabbing last year of a correctional officer at the California Institution for Men by an inmate with a long history of in-prison violence.

After the January 10, 2005 deadly attack on Correctional Officer Manuel Gonzalez at the California Institution for Men, the Inspector General recommended that inmates who return to prison after paroling from administrative segregation or a security housing unit — indicating possible violent tendencies — automatically be placed in administrative segregation at reception centers until they can be further evaluated. Reception centers serve as entry points into the state prison system for newly convicted offenders and former inmates who return to prison after either violating parole or committing new crimes.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation took steps last year to implement the Inspector General's recommendation, mandating that reception centers immediately isolate inmates who paroled earlier from security housing units or other segregated housing. The new procedures went into effect August 1, 2005.

Yet, in a surprise check carried out statewide on October 14, 2005, the Office of the Inspector General found that large numbers of potentially violent inmates who had paroled from segregated housing units had still slipped through the cracks and ended up in general population cells instead of administrative segregation.

In a 25-page report released Tuesday, the Office of the Inspector General reported that on the day of the surprise check it identified 66 inmates at five of the state's 11 prison reception centers who should have been locked in administrative segregation under the new procedures, but were not. Only one of six reception centers checked — the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego — had no such inmates mistakenly assigned to the general population.

Administrative segregation and security housing units are used to isolate inmates determined to be a danger to others or to be in danger themselves from other inmates. Unlike general population inmates, those in administrative segregation and security housing units are confined to their cells almost around the clock, including for meals, and are shackled and escorted by guards whenever they leave the cell for showers, exercise, or other reasons. In contrast, inmates assigned to general population housing eat meals in dayrooms and dining halls and spend a substantial portion of the day outside their cells.

The inmate who attacked Gonzalez in January 2005 had been locked in administrative segregation for fighting with other inmates at the time he paroled from an earlier prison term but was assigned to a general population cell at the California Institution for Men reception center after he returned to prison. Unaware of how dangerous the inmate was, Gonzalez had allowed him out onto the tier outside his cell at the time of the stabbing.

Noting that the surprise check on October 14, 2005 represented “a snapshot in time,” reflecting conditions only on that day, Inspector General Matthew L. Cate said the 66 inmates found in general population cells points to a problem of “serious magnitude,” given that thousands of inmates pass through the state's prison reception centers each year. In 2004, the reception centers processed 173,437 inmates, including 62,108 who were parolees returning to prison.

“Any failure of the state's prison reception centers to isolate these violent inmates puts officers' and inmates' lives in peril and jeopardizes the safety of the whole institution,” Cate said. “These are

dangerous inmates who have demonstrated from their past behavior that they cannot safely be housed in general population cells.”

Altogether, the six reception centers covered in the Inspector General’s review serve 52 of the state’s 58 counties, and in 2004 handled 125,422 incoming male inmates — 79 percent of the state’s incoming male prison population.

“Although the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation deserves credit for attempting to fix the problem after the Gonzalez stabbing,” said Cate, “the procedures it was using to identify inmates who need to be isolated clearly were not effective. The fact that one prison was able to do it right, however, shows that it can be done and prisons can be made safer.” That prison, the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, instituted additional procedures to supplement those mandated by the department.

The report released today noted that the new procedures also cause inmates who do not require isolation to be confined to administrative segregation unnecessarily, at a cost of at least \$12,853 more a year over the cost of placing the same inmate into a general population cell. Those affected are inmates who were put in administrative segregation during an earlier prison term not because they were dangerous but because they were threatened by other inmates as the result of a gang affiliation, drug debt, or other situation at that particular prison. If such inmates later return to prison they may no longer need protection and therefore may not require administrative segregation unless the same or similar conditions exist.

The Inspector General attributed the problems identified in the review to flaws in the department’s computer databases of inmate classification and housing information, along with human errors in using the databases. To correct the problem, the Inspector General recommended a new coding system in the database to flag inmates before they parole—clearly designating which inmates should be locked in administrative segregation and which can be safely placed in general population housing — so that the information is readily available to reception centers if the inmate returns to prison.

The full text of the Inspector General’s special review into housing of maximum custody inmates at state prison reception centers can be viewed and downloaded from the Office of the Inspector General’s web site at <http://www.oig.ca.gov/>. To view the report, click on the report title, “Special Review: Improper Housing of Maximum Custody Inmates at California Prison Reception Centers”

(March 2006), on the home page or on the link entitled “Reports – Audit and Special Review Reports” under “Improper Housing of Maximum Custody Inmates at California Prison Reception Centers, Special Review” (March 2006).

The Office of the Inspector General is an independent state agency responsible for oversight of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The office carries out its mission by conducting audits, special reviews, and investigations of the department to uncover criminal conduct, administrative wrongdoing, poor management practices, waste, fraud, and other abuses by staff, supervisors, and management. The special review was conducted under the authority provided to the Inspector General in California Penal Code section 6126.

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